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Westside Resource Conservation District

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COMMENTS PRESENTED
BY

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AT CALFED BAY-DELTA PROGRAM PUBLIC HEARING
SEPTEMBER 13, 1999, LOS BANOS, CALIFORNIA
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The Westside Resource Conservation District covers 1.1 million acres in Western Fresno and Kings Counties. 600,000 acres are irrigated cropland in the San Joaquin Valley, and 500,000 acres are rangeland watershed on the Inner Coast Range. The District is working on a number of resource problems, including erosion and sedimentation, control of flooding, agricultural drainage, and irrigation water management. With an adequate, firm, and affordable water supply and, in some areas, drainage, the fertile soils of the District are capable of producing some 40 different crops. District growers produce 26 to 30 percent of Fresno County's annual agricultural output.

The District's Directors are very concerned that the CALFED Draft Plan does not propose new water storage. With the continued growth in California's population and need for food and fiber to support this growing population, this is very unrealistic. District growers are presently using the most up to date water conservation practices available. They must have a surface water supply, not just depend on groundwater pumping from an already overdrafted water table. The District's Directors are also concerned that the CALFED Program appears to be more interested in fish and wildlife habitat than with new water sources for a growing population dependent on food, jobs, and a strong economy. The people part of the equation seems to have been lost in the process. The CALFED Program provides ironclad guarantees for fish but paper promises for people. A program is needed that is equitable and balanced among the needs of cities, farms, and the environment.

Surface storage facilities in various sizes and locations are critical to a Bay Delta solution. Removing thousands of acres of farmland from food

production is not a viable answer to reducing surface water demand. The potential environmental impacts of groundwater overdraft in the Valley, as well as the loss of farmland already occurring from increased urbanization, cannot be ignored. It is crucial that CALFED recognize the impacts and costs that have accrued to CVP water users since the CALFED process began, and to incorporate those impacts when cost allocation procedures are developed. It is in the best interests of everyone in this State the focus remains on the giant task ahead. The Delta must be fixed, and that means building storage facilities, improving management and operations, and implementing practical water conservation and transfer programs. The Delta won't be fixed with only one or two solutions. Affordable and equitable solutions must be based on good science. Simply throwing millions of acre feet of water at the problems, without biological and ecological justification is not reasonable management of a limited resource, nor is it the solution. Many people don't realize how much of California's economic strength depends upon agriculture. It is a quiet industry that, in addition to providing food and fiber, steadily and reliably adds tens of billions of dollars to the economy of the State. We should protect all the farmland we have, whether it is under the threat of urbanization or loss of its water supply.